



**Meeting with the City of La Crosse
Friday, October 1, 2004, 1:30 pm - 3:00 pm.**

People in attendance

John Medinger, Mayor of La Crosse
Randy Turtenwald, City of La Crosse
Ron Oleson, City of La Crosse
Pat Caffrey, City of La Crosse
Larry Kirch, City of La Crosse

Gary Brunner, WisDOT D5
Beth Price, WisDOT D5
Dale Oestreich, WisDOT D5
Casey Newman, WisDOT
Don Uelmen, WisDOT
John Swisler, WisDOT

- 1) Overview of WisDOT's meeting purpose and WisDOT's long-range plan, *Connections 2030*, by WisDOT staff: The meeting began at 1:30 with introductions. Casey Newman, WisDOT, gave an overview of WisDOT's long-range plan *Connections 2030*. WisDOT is seeking input on transportation planning issues from larger Wisconsin cities at this point. *Connections 2030* is scheduled to be completed in 2006.
- 2) Gathering of input from City of La Crosse: Staff from the City of La Crosse discussed the following:

Connections 2030

Mayor Medinger asked for clarification about what Casey meant by the term "policy plan". He asked if a policy statement could say that WisDOT opposes sprawl and that transportation spending will be directed to address it? Casey said that was correct although for that example a policy may emphasize system preservation favored over expansion. The Mayor then asked if we were amending Translinks 21 or if this was a new plan. Casey said that, technically, we're updating Translinks 21.

Pat asked about what if the city's plan is in conflict with the MPO plan. Casey conceded that would be a difficult issue to address but that we would be issuing draft policies and a draft plan and everyone can comment on them.

Mayor Medinger raised the issue of the North-South expressway in La Crosse. He noted the MPO supports it because only city residents would have to pay for it.

We were asked if the Corps of Engineers was considered to be a stakeholder; they are important for La Crosse because of barge and dam activity on the Mississippi River. Casey said we have not contacted them.

Local Planning Issues

Larry noted that 450 houses are built in the county annually; approximately half are in the city and the rest are on septic systems. The city's comprehensive plan essentially adopts existing zoning. The city is trying to buy all bluff lands bordering it. City officials provided us a copy of the city's plan. The city's plan emphasizes traditional neighborhood design, redevelopment of exiting parcels of the city (particularly near the river), and efficient commercial development. All new development should be accessible for transit service. The city sees tremendous potential for high-density residential development along the Mississippi River.

The city is doing an informal plan for the Town of Shelby because of future development potential. The town is cooperating but not participating.

Larry said that the city's population is roughly the same as it was in 1940. The city would like to capture a greater share of the regional population. They believe downtown development will promote that and there are many facets to achieving this vision: code enforcement, good schools, crime prevention, job development, among others. The Mayor said the city is hoping to attract aging baby-boomers to live downtown.

Officials noted many of the city's plans are available on their website (cityoflacrosse.org).

Transit

The transportation element of the local plan supports maximizing existing facilities, and relies on TDM and increased transit. The eventual plan is to extend transit to denser outlying areas. The MPO completed an update of its transit plan and is discussing regional service to West Salem, Onalaska and Holmen; there is presently service to La Crescent, MN. City officials said there is good cooperation between the transit system and the shared ride taxi systems in Onalaska and Holmen; there was recent approval of free transfers between them. The city feels that the large expansion of the bus system should help to partially address the North-South congestion issues in the city.

Larry noted that the city supported the county's grant application for funding of the county comprehensive plan.

The City and town of Onalaska are doing a cooperative comprehensive plan with the village of Holmen. City officials said that West Salem has a plan but expressed the opinion that it is not “smart growth” compliant.

The city supports RTA legislation; officials said they need a dedicated and reliable revenue source for transit funding; a sales tax was raised as one possibility.

Recent Developments

There is not much of a problem with complaints about trucks. Fleming Foods just took 400 jobs out of the city from just northeast of downtown. City officials are hoping Ashley Furniture will move in to the site. Complaints are heard mostly around Losey Blvd. The City Brewery produces truck traffic on the south side but officials don’t think that causes much of a problem with traffic delays.

Rail Issues

The city is trying to sell the Amtrak depot but is requiring the buyer to promise to maintain service. The county is trying to promote freight movement by rail in West Salem.

City staff indicated that railroad crossing safety and rail congestion and delay were not a problem for the city as this time.

Shipping issues

The city and county harbor commissions may soon join together. There is a continual need for dredging including near recreation boating marinas.

Airport

The city recently completed an airport plan. Their long-range plan called for relocation of an interchange on 90 to allow for a direct shot into the airport. WisDOT staff commented that the current access roads seem wide enough and have low ADTs. To the city, the issue is direct connection to the terminal (the current route is not direct). City officials are hoping a fourth air carrier, Delta, will come to the airport. Presently, Northwest, American and Midwest fly into La Crosse as does DHL and Fed Ex for air freight; they noted that air freight really helps support airport operations.

Bicycle and Pedestrian-related Activities

The city is working with schools and the Obesity Coalition to develop a Safe Routes to School program; so is Onalaska. The city would like more Enhancements funding and would like to see it balanced with highway spending.

Officials praised Vernon County for doing a good job on paving shoulders; it was noted that this typically occurred when federal STP dollars were used.

Officials noted that bikes are addressed in the MPO plan; the city is hoping to construct a bike overpass over the BN yard in 2006.